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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DILI 000429

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TAGS: PREL PHUM KDEM UNSC KPKO TT JA

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GUSMAO ASKS ANNAN TO RETAIN SRSG HASEGAWA THROUGH 2007 ELECTIONS

REF: (A) DILI 134; (B) STATE 40609

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CLASSIFIED BY: Grover Joseph Rees, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy

Dili, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

(1) (C) Summary: In response to reports that senior United Nations officials may have tentatively decided to replace Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Sukehiro Hasegawa with a new SRSG to lead the impending United Nations mission in East Timor, President Xanana Gusmao has sent a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan urging that Hasegawa be retained. The President's letter says it would be difficult for a new SRSG to develop the expertise and relationships Hasegawa has in time to provide effective advice to Timorese institutions charged with conducting the upcoming national elections. Gusmao's letter says that Prime Minister Ramos-Horta concurs in the recommendation to retain Hasegawa. Ensuring free and fair national elections, in part through a robust and policy-driven United Nations presence, has been a major preoccupation of both President Gusmao and Prime Minister Ramos-Horta in recent months. The Fretelin party, still led by former Prime Minister Alkatiri, continues to press for an election law that would seriously disadvantage opposition parties, and Hasegawa --- unlike some UN officials --- has been perceived as a strong supporter of the level playing field favored by Gusmao and Ramos-Horta. End Summary.

(2) (C) Background: Reports circulated in Dili diplomatic circles last week that highly placed UN officials, possibly but not necessarily including Secretary General Annan, had tentatively determined that SRSG Hasegawa should be replaced. These reports were confirmed by Hasegawa himself, who told Ambassador that he expected to take a new assignment within the United Nations system and hinted that this had not been his preference. The Japanese Ambassador to East Timor, whose Embassy had previously urged United States support for Hasegawa's reappointment, also indicated to Ambassador Rees on August 18 that he thought a decision had been made to replace Hasegawa.

(3) (U) In response to these reports, President Xanana Gusmao has sent a letter to SG Annan urging that he retain Hasegawa in the new mission. The letter focuses on the upcoming national elections, noting that "these elections need to be held within several months and it would be difficult for any new representative to become familiar with various issues and to advise effectively the government and other state institutions."

It adds that "Mr. Hasegawa has already been providing us with valuable advice and assistance so effectively that both Prime Minister Ramos-Horta and I" support retaining Hasegawa until after the elections are held in mid-2007.

(4) (SBU) Comment: The President's reference to support by Ramos-Horta for retaining Hasegawa is significant and somewhat surprising. The Prime Minister told Ambassador in July that he thought Hasegawa should be replaced by Ian Martin, who had recently led a high-level mission to East Timor on behalf of the Secretary General. Assuming the President's assessment of

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Ramos-Horta's current view is accurate, the Prime Minister's change of position might be explained in part by the intervening news that Martin is not available for the job, and perhaps also by the absence of any particularly impressive names among the rumored possible replacements for Hasegawa. Another important factor in Gusmao's and Ramos-Horta's thinking may be the continuing struggle over whether the 2007 elections will be conducted under laws and systems that are genuinely designed to ensure freedom and fairness. Gusmao and Ramos-Horta support an election law (such as the one recently proposed in Parliament by eight opposition parties) that would require the elections to be conducted under the authority of an independent national election commission, would give all parties seats in rough proportion to the number of votes they receive in the election, and would not impose significant obstacles to participation by small parties and/or new parties. The Fretilin bench in Parliament, which is in the majority, has reintroduced a very different draft election law that was originally proposed by the government of former Prime Minister Alkatiri, who is still

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Secretary General of Fretilin. The Fretilin-proposed law would

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require that the elections be run by the highly partisan Ministry for State Administration, would use a voting formula that would give no seats to any party that got less than five per cent of the votes, would redistribute these seats overwhelmingly to the largest party, and would impose a host of other barriers to entry by new parties, to participation by small parties, and to party-switching by Members of Parliament dissatisfied with their party leadership. While some UN officials, primarily from within UNDP, have been willing to accommodate the Fretilin position on these matters (see Ref A), Hasegawa --- although himself a veteran former UNDP official --- has strongly supported the position taken by Gusmao and Ramos-Horta (and by the United States, see Ref B) that the elections must be conducted under rules and systems that reflect a broad national consensus and ensure a level playing field.

End Comment.

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